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# Institutional Weakness and Conflict Management in Nigeria: The Need for Collaborative Governance Approach

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## ABSTRACT

In a culturally plural and religiously balkanized society like Nigeria the basic yardstick for measuring the effectiveness of the Government lies in its capability to develop an institutional frame-work which can facilitate the harmonious existence of the citizens through the integrative process of representative governance, sound judicial system and effective law enforcement agency. However, the Nigerian Government was established on a fragile legitimacy, by the diarchic British colonial administrative system under which existed a relatively weak central authority with more autonomous regions in terms of administration which invariably confer on the independent Nigerian state the colonial legacy of relatively strong regional and local ethnic authorities and weak central institutions in which the institutional mechanism for central coordination are either not fully internalized or weakly internalized hence the Nigerian central authority appear grossly infective to exercise substantial control over the entire geographical enclaves which therefore paved the way for the perpetuation of violence and conflicts. This paper therefore argues that a collaborative approach to governance both at the state and local government becomes an important yardstick for crisis management in Nigeria through the creation and internalization of new values. This is because the primary way of value creation involves focusing on the underlying interests of the diverse parties, public information sharing and constant communicating with one another, which can facilitate the formation of shared interests and the evolution of common value.

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## INTRODUCTION

Nigeria state as it is constituted today depict a picture typical of a failed state in terms of its institutional frame-work and central regulative capacity [29]. This is because despite over five decades of political independence the country is still tinkering here and there in search of legitimacy and loyalty from its citizens amidst serious threats of secessionism, separatism and insurgency [14]. Political conflict has therefore become a recurrent decimal in the Nigerian state which in several instances transform into violent confrontation either among the citizens or between the citizens and the Government.

Though politics as conceptualized by scholars is a conflict generating process, as it involves how values are authoritatively allocated among competing groups in the society, hence political conflicts are inevitable in human society especially in an heterogeneous and plural state like Nigeria [22]. However, conflicts become problematic when the institutional mechanisms established by the state failed to prevent the escalation of a simple conflict into violence as in the Nigerian case for instance, where political crisis such as civil war in the 1970 and the several incidence of inter-ethnic and religious clashes as well as the proliferation of ethnic militias and terrorist organizations such as Afenifere, ACF, Odua's people congress, MASOB, MOSOP, and Bokoharam were all anchored on the inability of the Nigerian central Government to respond appropriately to issues that mostly serve as the sources of grievances which eventually lead to either the eruption of violence or the emergences of militants, where as observed by Falola the ever increase in strength by both the Bokoharam insurgency and the Niger Delta militants is attributable to lack of federal Government presence in the far north-east and the crooks and creeks of the Niger Delta region.

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However, it is imperative to note that the weakness of the Nigerian central authority in governing the entire geographical enclaves as manifested in the current political system is indeed one of the legacies of the British colonization [29]. For Nigeria is essentially a British product, because prior to the amalgamation of the northern and southern protectorate in 1914 both regions existed and operated as entirely different countries with distinct nationals, political and administrative system. With the amalgamation of the two regions in by the Lugardian constitution in 1914, there was still no attempt by the colonial masters to established a unified institution that can governed the two regions as a single entity rather a system of divide and rule was adopted by the British which invariably lied the foundation of the weak central authority in Nigeria that was further confounded by the principle of regionalism under the Richard constitution which further weakens the central authority [22].

The British colonial administrative system depicted a picture typical of a diarchy where there was relatively weak central authority and more autonomous regions in terms of administration which invariably confer on the independent Nigerian state the colonial legacy of relatively strong regional and local ethnic authorities and weak central institutions, which in addition to constituting serious hindrance to nation-building and integration also planted the ember of rancor, acrimony, discord, mistrust and persistent conflicts and violence [15]. The British policy of divide-and-rule eventually prevent the development of stronger institution frame-work at the central level, Hence it becomes difficult to resolved ethnic and religious conflict through legal and institutional frame-works. Instead, regional disputes therefore continue to be resolved either through traditional authority or violence.

The British legacy of limited institutional capacity by the central Government to mediate political power in all the regions and to effectively regulate its territory invariably makes conflict and violence to remained integral part of the contemporary Nigerian state. As observed by [15] "Colonization led to the intentional establishment of weak state institution, as the British administration focused on economic exploitation at the expense of nation-building in Nigeria( p. 9). It is eve dent Therefore, that the persistent incidence of conflict and political crisis in Nigeria is due to the deliberate establishment of weak central authority in the pre-colonial epoch by the British through the divide and rule policy.

This because at independence in 1960, with the view to further maintain their exploitative grip on the Nigerian state the colonial masters deliberately handed over a powered Nigerian to a weak and disempowered central government, which was constituted clearly by diverse medley of people who interact but did not unite. The independent continue by this legacy which confer on its several attributes of negativities such as military incursion, the civil war between 1967-1970 and number of violent clashes either between the citizens or the state against some group of the citizens, which is indicative of how the weak institutional frame-work created and left behind by the British failed to coherently govern and administer the ethnically and religious diverse Nigerian state. though the country continue to survive despite all these imperfections, but there is never a serious effort to address such institutional weakness by the successive administrations thorough reforming British inherited administrative model, which continue to paved ways for crisis and violence where for instance extremist insurgence of Boko Haram have appropriated these weakness to attempt at overthrowing the government or at least carving out in territory of their own within the Nigeria state. it is the contention of this paper therefore that to address such institutional weakness there is a need to adopt a collaborative Governance approach which can serve as an effective regulative and integrative mechanism.

#### *Conceptual clarification:*

##### *Institutional weakness:*

A waek institution depicted a state of decline or powerlessness Government agencies to effectively discharge some of the fundamental responsibilities of the state such as the maintenance of law and order and the protection of its territorial integrity. As advocated by the fund for peace some of the manifestation of institutional weakness is: Losing control of territory or the sole power of using physical force therein, Crisis of legitimacy in which some part of the state seeks disintegration, Inability to provide basic services to the citizens etc.

There is no gain saying the fact that the contemporary Nigerian state has some of the regular attributes of institutional weakness such as central government incapacitation that it has minimal practical control over a lot of its territory; non-procurement of basic service; pervasive incidence of corruption and criminality; displacement of citizens due to crisis and threat of secession as well as a sharp economic decline.

##### *Conflict Management:*

This involves "the process of limiting the negative aspects of conflict while increasing the positive aspects of conflict. The aim of conflict management is to enhance learning and group outcomes, including effectiveness or performance in organizational setting" improper management of conflict will always have a devastating consequence on the organization survival. Hence an effective conflict management strategy is very vital for nation-building and national integration, in the sense that it provides legal, peaceful and positive means of resolving grievances among competing group in the society.

In a plural and polarized society like Nigeria the basic yardstick for measuring the effectiveness of the Government lies in its capability to develop an institutional frame-work which can facilitate the harmonious existence of the citizens through the integrative process representative governance, sound judicial system and effective law enforcement agency. However, as illustrated above the Nigerian Government was established on a fragile legitimacy where the institutional mechanism for central coordination are either not fully or weakly internalized which therefore paved the way for the perpetuation of violence and conflicts.

#### *The concept of Collaborative Governance:*

This involve “governing arrangement where one or more public agencies directly engage non-state stakeholders in a collective decision-making process that is formal, consensus-oriented, and deliberative and that aims to make or implement public policy or manage public programs or assets” [18].

Smith, view collaborative governance as involving “representation by key interest groups.” To Connick and Innes it connotes the ‘representation of all relevant interests groups in a complex society for a collective decision in policy making.’ Reilly describes it as a mechanism of problem solving in political settings involving the “shared pursuit of government agencies and stakeholders.” “stakeholder” in this parlance refer to the participation of citizens both as individuals and as organized groups.

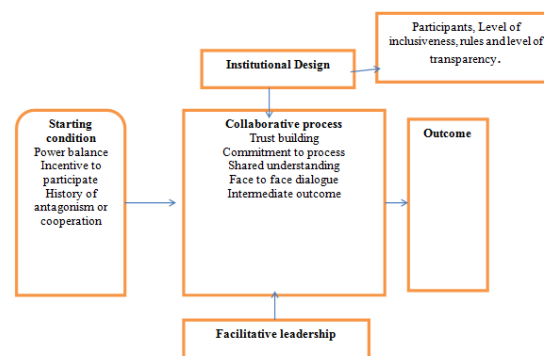
The important features of collaborative governance involve (1) the initiation of forum by government agencies or institutions, (2) where the forum include non-state actors participants (3) the non-state actors participants are directly engage in decision making hence do not merely constitute a “consultative” forum for the public agencies, (4) the forum is formally and collectively organized, (5) the aims of the forum is to arrive at a collective decisions by means of consensus (through compromise and mutual understanding), and (6) the focus of collaboration is on public policy or public management and (7) non-state actors assume responsibility for policy outcome, as they can participate “in all stages of the decision making process.” though the ultimate authority lies with the public agency.

It is a governance arrangement which create an avenue where multiple stakeholders come together in common forums with state-agencies thereby engaging in a consensus-oriented decision making. It involves a face-to-face dialogue in order to facilitate trust building, as well as the development of commitment and shared understanding, which could be achieved through a two-way flow of communication or multilateral deliberation.

Finally, collaborative governance is different from other forms of consensus decision making, such as alternative dispute resolution or transformative mediation in the sense that it focuses on public policies and issues. Collaborative governance also stands apart from two alternative patterns of policy making which are adversarialism and managerialism. It differs with the adversarialism, in the sense that it is not a “winner-take-all” form of interest intermediation. In collaborative governance, stakeholders will often assumed the character of adversarialism in relating to one another, but the goal is to create a win-win situation by transforming adversarial relationships into more cooperative ones. Also in contrast to managerialism, where public agencies make decisions unilaterally, virtually relying on expert’s advice to make decisions [19] collaborative governance demands that stakeholders be directly involve in the decision-making process [18].

#### *Collaborative Governance Model:*

The collaborative governance model involves four important variables which are the starting conditions, the institutional design, the leadership, and the collaborative process. The Starting conditions established the basis for the collaborative process which involves the social capital, the level of trust and conflict before and during the collaborative process, Institutional design on the other hand established the fundamental frameworks through which the collaboration takes place, leadership in this parlance mediate and facilitate the collaborative process, while collaborative process involve the strategies adopted in the collaborative process cycle.



**Fig. 1:** Model of collaborative Governance. *Sources* (Lasker and Elisa, 2003)

*Starting Conditions:*

It is imperative to note that the present conditions at the collaboration outset plays vital role in the collaborative process as it can either facilitate or hampers stakeholder's cooperation among themselves or between them and the Government agencies. To this end, three important pre-conditions are critical to the success or either wise of collaborative Governance.

*(1) Power imbalances:*

A commonly encounter obstacle in the collaborative governance is the power imbalances among stakeholders. For instances, the inequality of status, capacity, resources and organization among stakeholders denied some participant the right to engage in the collaborative process on equal footing with other stakeholders, which create high tendency for manipulation by actors with strong economic wherewithal's. For instances, as observed by Bradford a collaborative governance attempts by the Government of Ontario in the areas of occupational health and training were disrupted by the manipulative tendencies of the stronger of firms who were able to gain access to senior officials through "informal channels,". also reported that the environmental groups in the American societies do not seems to approved collaborative governance as they consider it one-sided. A successful collaborative approach must therefore take into cognizance's the resources and power imbalances among the stakeholder.

*(2) Incentives to Participate:*

Going by the fact that participation in collaborative governance is largely voluntary in nature, it is therefore, very vital to understand the incentives and motivation of the stakeholders who are to partake in collaborative governance by identifying the factors that shape and mold their commitments [3]. The public agency should therefore conduct a critical analysis of those incentives so as to ascertain the cost implication of collaborative governance. For instances, a study of Indian forest and irrigation agencies by Ebrahim revealed how important were positive financial incentives to collaborative success in the irrigation case.

Researchers on collaborative governance revealed that participation in collaborative governance processes is affected by the incentives of groups [20].

*(3) Prehistory of Antagonism and Cooperation:*

The history of cooperation or antagonism between stakeholders also plays a vital role in collaborative governance process is its can either facilitate or hampers the workability of the process [3]. In so many instances, a strong impetus for collaborative governance grows out of policy deadlocks [19]. Such circumstances usually happen in the area of resource management in which the deadlock is created by serious cost implication by both sides of the dispute. It is therefore, imperative to notes that high conflict may not necessarily constitute an obstacle to collaboration.

*Facilitative Leadership:*

Leadership is generally consider very pivotal in the collaborative process as it has the capacity to bring all the stakeholder together and coordinate their activities through the collaborative process (Burger *et al.* 2001; Frame, Gunton, and Day 2004; Gilliam *et al.* 2002; Gunton and Day 2003; Heikkila and Gerlak 2005; Imperial 2005; Lasker and Weiss 2003; Margerum 2002; Murdock, Wiessner, and Sexton 2005; Reilly 1998, 2001; Smith 1998). So many studies link the success of collaborative governance to facilitative leadership which has the capacity to motivate the stakeholders to engage in a collaborative spirit (Chrislip and Larson 1994; Ozawa 1993; Pine, Warsh, and Maluccio 1998; Reilly 2001).

*Institutional Design:*

This involves the rules and the basic protocols that provide meaning, shapes and direction to the collaborative process. Institutional design is very vital in conferring legitimacy to the procedures adopted in the collaborative process, where the most fundamental factor in the design is the access to the collaborative process. Researchers in collaborative governance emphasize openness and inclusiveness as the vital factors in collaborative design in the sense that having a legitimate participation opportunities increase stakeholders commitments (Andranovich 1995; Burger *et al.* 2001; Gunton and Day 2003; Lasker and Weiss 2003; Margerum 2002; Murdock, Wiessner, and Sexton 2005; Reilly 1998, 2001).

*The Collaborative Process:*

This involves the way and manner in which the collaborative process is carry out it involves number of phases and stages where the most important ones are:

*(1)Face-to-Face Dialogue:*

The basis of collaborative governance lies in achieving face-to-face negotiation and dialogue among stakeholders. It is indeed a consensus-oriented process, which lay much emphasis on “thick communication” thereby allowing by direct dialogue between stakeholders to identify opportunities for mutual gain. It is vital to note that face-to-face dialogue can eradicate all kinds’ stereotypes and misconceptions (Bentrup 2001). (Gilliam *et al.* 2002; Lasker and Weiss 2003; Plummer and Fitzgibbon 2004; Warner 2006).

*Trust Building:*

Trust building is very crucial to collaborative governance in the sense that the need for collaboration arise in the first place due lack of trust among stakeholders governance [37]. Studies therefore strongly suggest that the collaborative process must be geared toward addressing and building trust through negotiation [2,7,24,27].

*Commitment to the Process:*

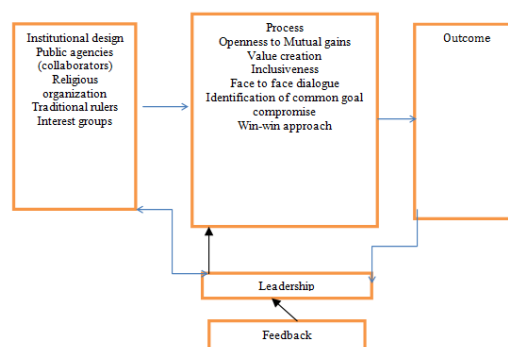
The success or failure collaborative governance depends to a large extent on the level of commitments by the stakeholders [2,20,26,16].

*Shared Understanding:*

The purpose of collaboration is to develop and maintained shared understanding among stakeholders of the strategies and method to be adopted in achieving a collectively goal [35] the share understanding therefore revolve around “common mission” “common ground” “common purpose” “common objectives” “common aims” “shared vision” “clear goals” “shared ideology” “clear and strategic direction” and “alignment of core values” [2,33,39,35,36,21,8].

*Intermediate Outcomes:*

Collaboration becomes effective and result oriented when there is feasible and concrete benefits derivable from partaking in the collaboration process and when the objective of the forum is clear and unambiguous [12].

*Application of Collaborative model to Crisis Management in Nigeria:*

**Fig. 2:**

From figure 2 above depict represent a framework of how collaborative Governance shall be implemented within the Nigerian political system, where the institutional design involve the stakeholders or the participants in the collaborative process which includes representative from religious organization, traditional rulers and several interest group where public agencies serve as collaborators and coordinators of the negotiation process. The collaborative process must involve inclusiveness, value creation, face-to-face dialogue, consensus, and compromise and must provide an avenue for feedback from the implementation of the decision which must also be under effective supervision and good leadership.

*Institutional Design:*

This is the most important aspect of the collaborative frame-work as it's involve the determination of who and who are to be consider as stakeholders in the collaboration. Taking into cognizance's the multiplicity of ethnic groups in Nigeria and the sensitivity of both ethnic and religious identities in mobilizing youth for violence's the most important stakeholders should therefore be traditional rulers and religious organization such as CAN and JNI. Other interest group such NLC and human rights agencies also need to be involved.

*Process:*

The collaborative process must center around openness to decision making where issues of mutual benefit are emphasized upon, through face-to-face dialogue among competing stakeholders, involving common goal identification and compromise so as to arrive at a decision which creates a win-win situation.

*Leadership:*

The collaborative process should be geared toward value creation hence it must avoid being too bureaucratic as this could be counter-productive because the purpose of collaborative governance is to reshape the citizens' interaction with the government toward developing a citizen-oriented public service built around the tenants of the NPM such as devolving authority, flexibility, improving the quality of regulation, enhancing responsiveness, pushing out control from bureaucracy to the community, emphasis should be based on goals not rules and regulations hence the ultimate approach should revolve around participative management. The leadership style should observe the tenants of good governance where transparency and accountability are enshrined thereby creating room for feedback.

*Conclusion:*

All said and done, this paper therefore, argues that a collaborative approach to governance both at the state and local government becomes an important yardstick for crisis management in Nigeria through the creation and internalization of new values. This is because the primary way of value creation involves focusing on the underlying interests of the diverse parties, public information sharing and constant communicating with one another, which can facilitate the formation of shared interests and the evolution of common value [32]. Although public agencies may have the ultimate authority to make a decision, the goal of collaboration is typically to achieve some degree of consensus among stakeholders, which becomes more likely in the sense that the diverse elements will each get something they want out of the negotiation, thereby giving rise to a mutually-beneficial outcome through a "win-win" solution. This also requires sound leadership through entrenching the four major pillars of good governance of accountability, transparency, rule of law and participation at all levels of government as this can gradually restore confidence in the citizen's mind about the state.

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